

## OPERATION OF KARMAS

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### ABSTRACT

The laws of *Karma* are intricate and have an element of interpretation as these are filtered through an individual's consciousness. The desire and challenge of every individual is to live in harmony with the laws of *Karma*. Wisdom is a part of spiritual inheritance, offering free choice and the will to act the choice. Wisdom determines whether one lives in harmony with the divine laws. Evolved souls learn to spend the wisdom appropriately. Expressions of free choice generate karma – the great law of cause and effect, which offers suffering for misdeeds or reward. Linked to the law of *Karma* is reincarnation which offers through successive embodiment in physical form the time to work out karma and express the operation of choice and will. NamitaGokhale's protagonists try to work out the operation of these divine laws. Success lies in working out harmony with these laws. [Martin, Karma and Reincarnation]

**KEYWORDS:** Laws of Karma, Harmony, Wisdom, Choice, Will, Reincarnation. [No. of Words: 145]

### INTRODUCTION

Karmas are produced in four ways: through thoughts, words, and actions which give rise to energetic vibration that come back to the originator as disasters or happiness. *SanchitKarma* is the accumulated Karma from all previous lives and only a small part of it comes into effect with each birth *Prarabdha* Karma appears as a particular problem in present life. *KriyamanaKarma* is produced in the present life and as *SanchitKarma* consequently shapes the future. Unconscious actions out of ignorance do not bear heavy consequences as do the intentionally inflicted harm though both create appropriate *karmic* effect. [Karma]

### DISCUSSIONS

NamitaGokhale's experiences of love and passion, illness and death shaped her work, as for her, the act of writing is therapeutic and a general expansion of limits of experience. As stated in *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, all her books are a vindication. In the book, Paro is Priya's alter ego and both have been developed as foils to each other. Priya, the narrator, lead a surrogate life and sought fulfillment by adopting the mediocre path. She married a person without love, yet secretly admired Paro's unbridled buoyant eccentricity. Paro's sharp impudence and mocking wit both frightened and exhilarated Priya. Priya constantly defined her existence, hopes, dreams, agonies, despairs, fashions and mannerisms in the context of her relationships with Paro. Their lives thus *Karmas* were intertwined. She could not understand the response which Paro generated among men, for Priya always did her duty and worried about other people's feelings, but was never acknowledged in return.

Priya's *Karma* was that everybody just took her more and more for granted whereas Paro got her way by indulging in emotional blackmail. The relationship of Paro and Priya symbolized the envy and hatred which a plain looking girl unconsciously has for a woman who possesses a natural charm and vivacity – the battle of haves and have-nots which

centuries of indoctrination have cemented in the feminine psyche. Priya never forgave Paro for marrying BR, the man whom she had idolized and defied in her fancies.

Parodeified spiritual and physical laws by indulging in whimsical social extremes. Even during intimate moments she was capable of dramatizing her experiences to gain a point. As child of middle aged parents, she was a “bother in their well - ordered lives,” [Gokhale, 1999, p 167] she spent her childhood in the hostel of a remote public school. She was sexually abused by a school teacher while in her teens, and this experience left an indelible scar on her psyche. In every encounter with a new male she let herself go for conquest and relentlessly used the tactical advantage of her sex to obtain a victory, which often proved to be pyrrhic. Priya was shattered by this attitude and resignedly watched the phenomena of having every male in her life “in eternal bondage to Paro.” [Gokhale, 1999, p 50] Paro had intuitively realized the truth, which many women are able to only after a consummate life – long struggle that a woman confined by her codified roles of mother, wife, sweet-heart, daughter and sister; has no weapon other than her sex. Paro did not perceive any shame or furtiveness in using the weapon of sex to overcome her inferiority. To find her own self-hood she set about mutilating, dominating men she encountered, denying their truths and values and destroying their superiority.

However, uninhibited Paro, who was not able to take on the world as a sovereign arbiter of her own destiny, found it impossible to nullify the social conditioning and was haunted by the contradictions which generations of mental, economic and emotional slavery had fixed in the feminine mind. She was vain, touchy, malicious, having a knack for her destruction and enchaining men by means of the desire she aroused in them. Yet paradoxically she wanted a deified man too, who could enchain her and glorify her abject emotional surrender. She wanted to possess such a man completely and be possessed by him. Girls are nurtured on the myth of the saviour – hero. The society cherishes the myth that a woman can realize her true worth and happiness only if she finds appreciation by a man. All women are systematically trained to seek the justification of their existence in men. Paro was a product of this social indoctrination. Her live-in relationship with Bucky Bhandpur was an assertion of her individual independence, her romantic affection for Lenin was a conquest, portraying an attention-seeking and emotion-starved self, but her servile infatuation with ShambhuNath Mishra testified her psychological bondage.

Paro’s emotional surrender, received a typical masculine response. Mishraji tired of her devotion, wanted to get rid of her. Attempting to continue this insane romance, she stoically underwent humiliation of begging and cringing, even of being beaten by Mrs. ShambhuNath Mishra. However, her indomitable spirit enabled her to overcome this tragedy and lead a life which was free of Mishraji’s ghosts. Paro lived with Lenin, flirted with Suresh, married Leoros, a gay film director, had an accident, was saved and then committed suicide. She had attained almost celebrity status and was a prototype of a liberated woman. But her ultimate rejection of life raised several doubts about the authenticity of her public image, and made her flights from one extreme to another less genuine. When Paro slashed her wrist Priya could read an immense dejection from the futility of her struggle. Paro’s unsettled life was an impatient, poignant protest of a determined woman unwilling to pilfer her identity in a manmade world, a woman in whose behavior, the luminous screen of non – conformist gestures had shielded an inner void which she could not fill despite innumerable relationships, a woman who ended up jeopardizing her life itself in the process.

Paro’s foil Priya presented a different aspect of a woman’s voyage to self identification. Coming from a typically middle class family Priya idolized and was mesmerized by the charm and sophistication of B.R. Desperate in her attempts to bedeck herself, she derived her worth from a capricious approval of her lover. Her insecurity had gneiss in her mother’s

attitude towards her. Despite her practices and pretensions, Priya was dazzled by the bold, reckless charm of Paro and longed for grace, beauty and harmony represented by her. In comparison she felt crushed, beaten and defeated, and immediately put Paro in the citadel of a rival. In order to cement a victory over her, she decided to imitate and outsmart her. When Priya received a matrimonial alliance in a state of vexed consternation she accepted it willingly – the photograph of the boy leaning on a standard herald car tilted the scales in the boy's favour. Priya's house – keeping after her marriage to Suresh was a deliberate imitation of whatever she could glimpse of Paro and her home with B.R. Paro was an alter ego who had to be conquered, vanquished and annihilated for exorcising the ghosts of the past imagination and phobia. Priya opted for arranged marriage as it is the only institution which could provide a semblance of socio-economic and emotional security to a tradition bound mediocre woman. Simon de Beauvoir very rightly commented, "Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society. It is still true that most women are married, or have been or plan to be, or suffer from not being. The celibate woman is to be explained and defined with reference to marriage, whether she is frustrated, rebellious, or even indifferent in regard to that institution." [Gaur, p 108 - 9] Such marriages of convenience include deception, lies and stratagems for the creation and perpetuation of a superficially secure atmosphere at home. Priya despite her infatuation with BR, kept her marriage intact. She seldom displayed her real self to her husband and was watchful to convey the image of an ideal wife. Marriage failed to provide her happiness. It mutilated her psyche and doomed her to a repetitive routine. The diary she wrote about "passion, boredom, vanity and jealousy" [Gokhale, 1999, p 144] provided an escape route. It was her nemesis, confession and catharsis. In the end, other options being closed she came back to her husband and marriage. Her marriage alleviated her toil and economic hardship, but also fixed her design for living – ennui, waiting, monotony and disappointment.

In *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*, Gudiya the narrator tells the story with brutal frankness and candour. Gudiya's *skarmas* made her pass through various kinds of experiences that modified her personality and her approach to things though not in a remarkably appreciable way. Gudiya's pale-gold skin had been endowed to her by some Afghan forbear or phirangi customer of her mother's. She often thought of the Englishman who might have been her father. Neither she, nor her mother or grandmother knew who her father was. Gudiya, her and grandmother fled from small town scandal and disgrace. As Gudiya's mother later decamped with Riyasuddin Rizvi, she was left with Ammi, her grandmother, under a Peepul tree in utter penury. While in the beauty parlour she looked into the many mirrors that crowded the room, she could barely recognize herself and imagined she saw many faces staring back, and asked "which of them was me?" [Gokhale, 2001, p.89] Gudiya resolved to change her name, her identity, her very self. She became a creature of possibilities, unfettered by a past, totally involved in the process of becoming a new person. She gave full scope to her imagination and became consumed by a set of intense and overlapping day dreams where she was variously, the daughter of an English Lord, an Arab Sheikh and a passionate blue blooded bandit who was shot dead after secretly marrying her mother. Finally, she settled on a tragic feudal past and became Pooja Abhimanyu Singh, cherishing the terrible tale of her parent's star-crossed love. She practiced a series of elaborate signatures, hoarded clues and signs of her new identity; a photograph of her father which she appropriated from a junk shop, set in an elaborate gilt frame. With a disposition towards revenge, she transformed her identity conceptualizing Pooja, her background, her family, her past and naturally her future.

The Peepul tree, a constant in Gudiya's life, was a part of the spiritual presence of lord Shiva helping her. For "Its leaves talked to me in a sibilant murmur, and I knew ghosts and spirits dwelt in its enormous gnarled branches. At night I was sure I could hear them, laughing and talking in a perfectly normal way. Sometimes they would scream –soft strangled

sounds that only I could hear, which would make the hair on my arms stand up on ends and send a shiver down my spine.” [Gokhale, 2001, p.89] To assuage her fears, grandmother pointed out that these spirits were familiars, helping and serving them. Whenever Gudiya was insecure, she felt and heard the presences on the Peepul tree. One such instance was when after the death of Ammi, Pandit Kailash Shastri entered her room with a swarm of Sadhus, to dislodge Gudiya, the last legacy of holy Ammi. Gudiya was insecure because she felt that unlike Ammi, these real holy men, had mystical powers, knew the background of Gudiya and Ammi; and that they also knew where Ammi was and would summon her to take her away. Thus, as fear turned to panic, she blacked out when she heard the sibilant murmur and saw presences on the Peepul tree.

Yet, when Gudiya felt content with life, the leaves were replete with sap and spirit. They waved around sinuously in the breeze, as a deep, long sigh escaped from the dense boughs. Gudiya felt languorous and relaxed and strangely contented, as though her brow was being soothed by some unseen hand. She felt she was a little girl again, nestling in Ammi’s lap. It was in the presence of the Peepul tree with a crescent moon suspended over it, that Phoolwati and Sundar got down to digging the hidden treasure of gold coins. The Peepul tree and crescent moon symbolized the divine Lord Shiva bestowing his blessings on her. Sundar unearthed the hidden treasure of gold coins. Towards the end of the story all kinds of construction – small shrines, a boundary wall, a *piau*, had crowded around in the contours of the Peepul tree. But it had not lost its mystery and had become domesticated, tamed, habituated. Many times, as the day faded and the evening shadows fell, i.e. the troubles of life again showed their presence, Gudiya found her daughter Mallika at play under the sheltering branches. She was certain that her friends and familiars were watching over her. She would glance up, involuntarily, but they no longer recalled themselves, although Gudiya could often hear a familiar sigh or catch the fragment of a familiar song from the rustle of the gentle green leaves. Thus, though the Peepul tree with the spirits remained a source of strength watching over Gudiya and Mallika, as Gudiya matured and faced the uncertainties and troubles of life with increasing confidence, the spirits no longer appeared as visions though she did sense their presence.

Gudiya’s existence was fraught with conflict. Gudiya’s memories of her childhood were marked by contradictions which even Ammi in her new avatar failed to resolve. Memory abandoned her and it was from hearsay that she could patch together what had happened, Gudiya’s Muslim background, her mother being a Kothewali and her grandmother a local godwoman with Gudiya and Ammi living in the realms of a temple all presented a confused picture for Gudiya. So much had happened to Gudiya in her short life that fear, sorrow, surprise, or any kind of reaction completely failed her. Grandmothers increasing abstractions, her detachment and her inexplicable remoteness had affected Gudiya more than she betrayed. On top of that Gudiya was at the confusing age of puberty, an age fraught with turmoil and agitation in the body, mind and environment. Ammi’s detachment and her preoccupation with some elusive inward journey only aggravated Gudiya’s need for her individual attention. She began to hate Ammi with a desperate longing. Gudiya needed to provoke and anger her, but when she confronted her and met the calm serenity of her wrinkled face, Gudiya withdrew even further into confusion and hurt. Yet, Gudiya felt secure in Ammi’s immortality for Ammi was all she had. Gudiya’s life had always possessed a haphazard and unreal quality and when she contemplated her grandmother, contorted into an extraordinary pose by the indefatigable Pandit, her last link with reality snapped. Gudiya realized that Ammi had not been her grandmother for quite some time. Yet, whatever continuity and cohesion her life had ever contained had been gifted by Ammi and Gudiya wondered after Ammi’s death “What was to become of me?” [Gokhale. 2001, p.90]. Thus Gudiya realized later she had misunderstood Ammi’s affections and her celestial quiescence. After the death of Ammi, Gudiya felt comfortable, loved and secure; quartered with Phoolwati. With a little exercise of the positive imagination she managed to

amend her memories of Ammi, recasting Ammi in the role of a beloved and benevolent grandmother. Gudiya sought the blessings of her grandmother and mother by putting on the old chunri, for her marriage. Also after being beaten by drunken Kalki, Gudiya went to the temple and asked Ammi's statue 'why.'

Phoolwatigave Gudiya a rudimentary outline of facts of life. She assumed responsibility for grandmother and Gudiya, and her cheerful corpulence gave an edge of reality to Gudiya's strange existence. Sharing a fierce independent spirit, Phoolwati's dignity, intelligence, perseverance and goodwill gave bulwark to Gudiya. As Pooja, Gudiya had begun to find the smell of Phoolwati's hut unbearable which reeked of poverty and social suppression. Stricken with shame and humiliation, Gudiya resented her surroundings intensely and longed to break into a new life. However, it was Phoolwati and Sundar in whom Gudiya confided about her hidden treasure. It was because of Phoolwati's over practical presence, that the ghosts, familiars and forgotten friends of her childhood, though silenced for the moment, on the Peepul tree, were waiting only for the slightest indication from Gudiya, to make themselves once again manifest. Gudiya felt a strange affinity with Roxanne, for Roxanne's pale ivory skin approximated Gudiya's gold-white one. Gudiya's childhood passed without event because she never attempted to compare or reconcile her two disparate lives – one her school and the other her life in the *Mandir*. However, the well – meaning insensitivity and the arrogance inherent in Roxanne's charity embarrassed and enraged Gudiya. Inculcated with a fierce sense of self – worth. Gudiya resolved to get even with all of them. Only when Roxanne was on her death bed did Gudiya realize her goodness. She encouraged Gudiya to believe and trust in herself. Gudiya felt that she had not repaid her faith. So to demonstrate her love, Gudiya brought some ritual and dignity to Roxanne's departure from the world. The tussle between the incongruous Roxanne and Phoolwati over Gudiya, increased the insecurities of Gudiya, Added to this was the opposition of Mr. Lamba, Roxanne's husband, who made it clear that Gudiya's stay in their house was an informal arrangement and at no stage was Gudiya to be adopted.

School too was a disaster for Gudiya as she was older and taller than most of the students in her class. St. Jude's had only up to the eight grade, and she was already in the seventh. It was unlikely that she would get admission to any good English medium school. Her stay at Roxanne's house had only reinforced her ingrained feeling of superiority, and she had become utterly obnoxious to both her teachers and fellow students. Nobody forgot their special relationship though later she was not conspicuously Roxanne's favourite. This combined with her status as Ammi's granddaughter, labeled Gudiya as being different from other girls in her class. Moreover, the other three capable and clever girls came from disadvantaged but stable backgrounds. Their stories were not dissimilar to Gudiya, yet they were different, they knew who they were. Gudiya was tired of the tussle for ownership over her by Roxanne, Phoolwati, Pandit Kailash Shastri and Sundar Phalwan for she believed that like grandmother, she belonged to no one. Rejecting the claims of everyone Gudiya felt free but alienated and was haunted by insecurities of her past. Everything seemed to be conspiring against her and pushing her towards greater insecurities.

On meeting, Kalki, Gudiya hoped that he would redeem her, just as Lord Kalki, the scourge of Kaliyug would come riding on a white horse to redeem the world. Both Gudiya and Kalki put on false identities for each other. Gudiya became Pooja Abhimanyu Singh and Kalki too was an assumed name. Their love remained in the realm of make – believe. Behind Kalki's carefully maintained façade he was seething with aim penetrable desperate rage against her for their marriage. Kalki habitually borrowed money from Gudiya. She had to resort to regularly pilfering small amounts of cash from the bundles of hundred rupee notes which Phoolwati stashed around the house. She desperately wanted to comfort him, and she wished she were an heiress. A nebulous plan developed in her mind, she was not penniless. She felt

that if she retrieved the treasure Saboo had inadvertently dug up, she would be rich and Kalki would be happy. Gudiya was not blind to the realities of Kalki's nature, nor had she forgotten the lessons of her mother, the inept prostitute with her pitiable habit of falling in love. In spite of her total and consuming infatuation she understood well that there was something noble and base about Kalki. She thought that she would surprise him at the appropriate time and use the gold to buy him. Some innate wisdom had restrained her from telling Kalki about the gold. When Kalki abandoned her to make a life in the film world, Gudiya's adaptability and survival instinct helped her fall into the rhythm of her new life with a flexible ease. Phoolwati glimpsed very little of the agony she was undergoing for Gudiya was determinedly cheerful, but inside, there was a deep unutterable fear that this was how her whole life might pass – in indifference, indignities and calculated cruelties.

Gudiya refused Pandit Kailash Shastri's offer to read her hand. She did not want to know her future as she was ready for whatever came her way. Once in a while, Gudiya took out her single remaining gold sovereign and conjured life in old havelli with the hundred and thirty rooms, the laughter and gaiety and chandeliers and silver chalices of wine overflowing onto a flowered Persian carpet. Sometimes she went through the photographs of her marriage. It all seemed far away and unreal. Living in the present, she had forgotten Kalki. Life in Phoolwati's house had a soothing sameness in its rhythm. Phoolwati was invariably gentle with Mallika, Gudiya's daughter and Gudiya. Gudiya saw her looking at her speculatively, assessing for damage, but Phoolwati wisely kept her silence. Gudiya often dreamt about her mother, but she was elusive even there. Grandmother was dead, Roxanne was dead, Sundar was dead. "Even Kalki is gone, but the end of the world is nowhere in sight." [Gokhale, 2001, p.240] Thus, all the people Gudiya looked up to were dead. Kalki, her husband, the one person she thought would deliver her from pain and insecurities actually left her with greater scares but life went on for Gudiya. Though the novel ends on a note of deep pain and emotional agony, *Gudiya Karma* of exceptional fortitude made her a survivor for she renders her painful past acceptable, if not accountable.

*A Himalayan Love Story* sets out to chart the course of survival of those who are not the fittest of their kind. Obviously, the writer is interested in much more than their mere survival. The theme of a frail, poor neglected daughter of a poor, neglected widow growing up in one of the most backward areas of the state of UP, Parvati (literally meaning a daughter of the mountains), is established early on, as the idea that informs and animates the core of the work. Parvati was human, fragile and stubborn and hungry for justice, adventure and good fortune in an unjust, introverted and decadent society of Kumaoni Brahmins. A tragic end was established as her irrevocable *Karma*. It is a moving tale of human struggle for dignity in the midst of deprivation.

The novel portrays Parvati, whose age, family background (with a tubercular and promiscuous mother, cast out by her cruel and anglophile brother Hirananda Joshi, Headmaster of Nainital) and times go on to shape her. After her mother's death, Parvati moved to Nainital, to her bachelor uncle's cottage. At the Wee Nooke, Parvati began to ossify and turned into a flat cut out of her original self. She had a couple of Paro like torrid affairs, was also married Paro – like, briefly and unhappily to a homosexual named Lalit Joshi. She then went on to be predictably impregnated by her husband's only brother, and was ultimately lodged in a mental asylum in Bareilly. At this point re-entered, Mukul Nainwal, from Far East; the silent and brooding old flame, whose rich and still unexplored waters ran deep. Nainwal, a favourite of the ogre uncle, had been made the only beneficiary of the old man's last will. The ageing Nainwal married to a white woman, faced his childhood world, with a clinched NRI moan of disbelief. He found Irra, the silent and precocious daughter of the deranged Parvati, in charge of her fragile mother, and bequeath the fortune Parvati's uncle had left him, back to Parvati.

She being insane and her daughter a child, the fortunes, were likely to fall in custody of uncouth trio of vague relatives. Nainwal, after a brief period of anguish - ridden mourning, left Parvati and Irra to their mercies and rode back, sad and lonely. Nainwal's behavior is a very recognizable trait of an émigré soul, to make the world in the image of one's desire.

Parvati encountered a strange woman in the forest. She was absolutely terrorized by the encounter and realized that she was doomed, as the woman's madness called out to hers. Thus, the tone of the novel is set. Parvati hoped to seek comfort from her mother but her mother was closeted in the shop with Srikrishanji, with whom she had sexual relationship. Parvati's world was shattered. Initially refusing to accept the truth, Parvati the narrator internalized her pain, as a voice within her slandered her mother and proliferated into many voices which conducted long, heated debates inside her head. Later, when her mother was diagnosed with tuberculosis, Parvati wondered if her illness had resulted from her shameless spying or perhaps the spirit that possessed her had chosen to destroy her on being found out. Parvati exhibited lack of emotions when her mother died, knowing that her life would change after her mother's death. She looked forward to living a luxurious life in the house of her uncle Hiranada Joshi. Parvati, like Gudiya was at the age of puberty when her life changed as a result of her mother's death.

Parvati was given to sudden fits of depression. In spite of being in love with Mukul Nainwal, she married Lalit Joshi, due to caste bindings. She was deeply affected by homosexual Lalit's hostility towards her, which seeped osmotically into her system. Even after a year, they did not consummate their marriage, and she realized that they never would. Lalit died due to abdominal tuberculosis, leaving her impregnated by his brother Raju. With the birth of Parvati's daughter Irra, Parvati's insanity was complete. She had schizophrenia. Schizophrenia denotes a severe and complex mental illness wherein the patient loses the ability to think or feel; behaves abnormally, perceives a distorted reality, and suffers from delusions. The exact cause is not known yet. It is a bio psychosocial model of illness, which is transmitted genetically through vulnerable individuals, exposed to traumatic critical or stressful environment, resulting in biochemical irregularities in the brain.[Scarf]

Mukul Nainwal had known that Parvati was given to depression. Mental illness ran like a secret rivulet through the genetic pools of Kumaon. The inconsistencies in Parvati's behavior and appearances were apparent. Heartbroken after the marriage of Parvati, Mukul went away from Nainital where he had been moulded by Hiranada Headmaster's dreams and ambition into the man he was. Nainital had been his retreat, haven and sanctuary. Though, he was relieved to be back in Nainital, he felt rejected and used, as the people treated him like a tourist. Torn between his love for Nainital and Parvati on one hand and his responsibilities towards his wife Adeleine and family, he panicked as a result of a sudden crisis of identity. He realized that happiness can only be grasped in retrospective. He longed for Adeleine's unemotional presence and was exhausted with too much of reminiscence. He carried the rejection of Parvati all his life. He mused the wound with devotion, the hurt mingled in time with the alienation from home and India, until his love for Parvati and for his homeland combined into a single dull pain.

The *Book of Shadows*, deals with the loneliness and loss of identity of Rachita Tiwari after she suffered an acid attack. Namita Gokhale also portrays as to what happens when the human mind progressively becomes disembodied and finds in its incorporeal existence, independence that its physicality is never capable of assuming. She also shows what happens to the disembodied mind due to insecurities generated in the mind because of excessive memories and dreams that only the human existence can breed. The choice she offers was between finding freedom and release in the shapeless ambiguity of the spirit and embracing the bondage of the frail and fallible body, which is open to pleasure but always

vulnerable to pain. The novel is an exploration of, and an attempt to resolve pain, both in its physical and psychological manifestations, in the gross and subtle forms. In the process, she seems to have “posited a new Law of Conservation of Pain: it can neither be created nor destroyed, but only transformed from one form to another.” [Venkataramanan]

The story is about people trying to flee from pain and ending in greater pain. For Rachita, the disfigurement caused to her face as a result of the acid attack, made her withdraw from social life. She fled unsavoury publicity and found solace in the hills in a house which belonged to her celibate maternal uncle. Here she found the company of Lohaniju who belonged to the house. She read the journal of an English missionary who built the house, but who lost his life as the house was built at an inauspicious ridge. The other occupants of the house, innocent as well as sinful, too met with violent deaths and were denied passage to the nether world, as they dabbled with forbidden love and forbidden arts. These people lived lives of hedonism in an endless pursuit of pleasure. There is a ghost too in the house who is a silent spectator to the follies of its occupants and it chronicles the history of the house. The ghost was disgusted by the human anatomy and by the pleasures of flesh the humans so keenly sought. The house signified the mind of Rachita and hence NamitaGokhale. The inhabitants were the insecurities that resided in her mind as a result of the loss of face i.e. loss of identity following the acid attack. Rachit and hence NamitaGokhale seemed to be exorcising the ghost of her insecurities. She did so by setting in motion a *Karmic* cycle, following the so called sacrifice of a young boy, in order to restore the flagging energies of the middle aged impotencies of Wolcott, Nicolas Krutz and Nicholas Mann, and also to gratify Veera and Dona Rosa. Each of the inhabitants who were the perpetrators of the crime was killed violently. The child signified innocence of Rachita and also perhaps NamitaGokhale’s which was sacrificed. Rachita realized that a firm hold on anything, even reality, hurts less than a timid half – way encounter. She realized that pain was a pre – condition to life, a prelude to joy. It is a teacher not a tormentor. Similar was the re – integration of her broken world. Without any improvement in her worldly situation, she came to terms with life as a process of making and re – making the self. In the author’s note NamitaGokhale says that she had lived in the house she has written about and that its story has its core in truth. However, she has proficiently mixed the autobiographical elements. This has been done with an admixture of reality and illusions, making the mundane collide with the ethereal, sublimating the “unidimensional nature of the world with the translucence and depth of imagination”. [Venkataramanan]

Shakuntala the protagonist of *Shakuntala – The Play of Memory*, was spirited, imaginative and adventurous, but destined to suffer the *sanskaras* of abandonment like her legendary namesake, the heroine of Kalidasa’s *Abhijanam Shakuntalam*. She lay abandoned on the banks of Ganga in Kashi, convulsed by remembrance and fear of recognition. The priest told her that the memories persist as past life lives on, and that each person carries the residue of unresolved *karmas*, the burden of debts which have to be repaid thus life has to be confronted, as only in acceptance lay release. The debris of life pursues one through birth and rebirth. As she felt the world close in on her she was paralysed with despair which consumed her as when everything is about to end.

Those were troubled times for the Brahmins as the deceitful faith of Buddha had usurped the true path of the ancient religion. Disorder reigned but Shakuntala saw no error in disorder, it seemed to be natural condition of life. On listening to the magic mantra from a Bhikuni, “Arise! Commence a new life!” [Gokhale, p.15] Shakuntala was disquieted. She feared that she might have to share the fate of her namesake, when her husband brought home a handmaiden. She went to the Matrika temple and felt protected in the *garbhagriha*, the womb of the temple, symbolic of a mother’s womb. Many questions lay between her and her husband just as the rod of *Visvasu* had, forcing them to abstain



from sex. Hurt and anger transformed her and she was determined to retrieve her life. Her *yonis* was the only part of her body which was still alive and all pain, joy and hope concentrated there as the rest of her was insulated and deadened.

Facing neglect from her husband Shakuntala assumed the identity of *Yaduri*, a fallen woman and deserted home and duty for the company of Nearchus, a Greek traveler, she met by the Ganga. Shakuntala surrendered to a world of pleasures, reveling in complete freedom, as her body hungered and feasted on flesh. As the excitement of adventure began to wear off she tried to regain her bearing. At the first sight of Kashi, the city she longed to see, the city where the faithful arrive in the hope of departure; for to die in Kashi was to escape the remorseless cycle of birth and rebirth, she “shivered with a strange sense of premonition”. [Gokhale, p.137] There Shiva bent over the dying and whispered his Tarakamantra of deliverance which liberated them and ferried them across the river of oblivion to the shores of Moksha. This did not happen with Shakuntala for so utter was her ruination and destruction. She left Nearchus. Being no one’s wife, mistress, nor sister; she wandered aimlessly and found herself in the path of a charging bull. As the chanting of mantras rose from afar, the bull bowed its head to her as if asking for forgiveness and to establish that it was only doing its duty, buried its horns into her stomach twice. At that last frontier there was no place for terror, no pain as the body has its own defense against extreme pain, there was only a luxurious surrender. The world had abandoned her and perhaps it was time she abandoned it. As she moved on with her journey after death, intent on her destination, even the lady of the burning ghats, the devourer of desires, Kali, was moved by her courage and granted her battling soul safe passage. Her soul travelled back to the place where her resolution faltered and she made love to Nearchus for the first time. Thus, her desire to seek salvation and Moksha was denied to her. She did not seek release; but could not forget.

## CONCLUSIONS

Thus with the choices that NamitaGokhale’s protagonists made came consequences. Wisdom was provided to them so as not to squander their lives in self - gratification and self - aggrandizement. The ultimate purpose of free choice is to act in harmony with eternal laws and resolve *karmas* in the present life through a magnanimous internal strength and attitude and hence bring about spiritual enlightenment.

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